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ABSTRACT

The number of persons aged 25-64 enrolled in school has increased dramatically between 1978 and 1993, but it is not clear that these adult students are reacting to labor market incentives to a much greater extent than before. The data indicate that most of the increase in the number of older persons enrolled in school results from a rise in the size of that population, not from rising rates of enrollment. On the other hand, increases have occurred in enrollment rates of women between the ages of 25 and 54. Since the late 1970s, women have made up the majority of older students. From 1978 to 1993, the proportion of women aged 25-64 who were attending school climbed from 4.0 to 5.1 percent, whereas that for men slipped from 3.9 to 3.7 percent. In 1993, adults who had college degrees or had completed some college were more likely to be enrolled than high school graduates or those with less education. Professionals and managers were overrepresented among adult students; blue-collar workers were underrepresented. (KC)

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ED 396 170

Issues in Labor Statistics

U.S. Department of Labor
Bureau of Labor Statistics

School Enrollment After Age 25

School enrollment has risen substantially among adults in recent years. This sometimes has been construed as recognition of the labor market rewards to higher levels of education, such as higher earnings and reduced risk of unemployment. Such rewards may have spurred school attendance of persons age 16 to 24, whose rate of school enrollment has also been on the rise. But findings from the Current Population Survey (CPS) that show an increase of 45 percent in the number of 25-to 64-year-olds attending school between 1978 and 1993, do not entirely reflect a trend toward lifelong learning among the group.

Indeed, the rapid rise in the number of older students only partially results from an increase in the likelihood of their being enrolled. Their school enrollment rate edged up only slightly, from 4.0 to 4.4 percent between 1978 and 1993. Seventy percent of the rise in school enrollment among adults reflects the now well documented ballooning of the adult population aged 25 to 64 resulting from the aging of the baby-boom generation. (See table 1.)

Who are they?

Increases have occurred in enrollment rates of women between the ages of 25 and 54. Since the late 1970's, women have made up the majority of older students. From 1978 to 1993, the proportion of women aged 25 to 64 who were attending school climbed from 4.0 to 5.1 percent, while that for men slipped from 3.9 to 3.7 percent. (See table 1.)

Among age groups, 25-to 34-year-olds continued to have the highest enrollment rate (7.9 percent). That rate, however, was about the same in 1993 as it had been 15 years earlier. At the same time, there were small increases in enrollment rates among persons aged 35 to 44 (from 3.5 to 4.3 percent) and 45 to 54 (from 1.7 to 2.4 percent).

In 1993, adults who had college degrees or had completed some college were more likely to be enrolled than high school graduates or those with less education, as shown in the following tabulation of enrollment rates by educational attainment:

Less than a high school diploma	0.7
High school graduates, no college	1.0
Some college or associate's degree	7.8
College graduates	5.8

Thus, those enrolled in school already tend to have higher levels of education. As the data on education would suggest, professionals and managers—occupations which tend to require higher levels of schooling—were overrepresented among adult students, while blue-collar workers were underrepresented. (See table 2.)

IN SUMMARY, while the number of persons aged 25 to 64 in school has risen dramatically, it is not clear they are reacting to labor market incentives to a much greater extent than before. The

Table 1. School enrollment by age and sex, October 1978 and 1993

Age	Enrolled in school (thousands)			Enrollment rate [1]		
	Total	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women
1978						
Total, 25 to 64 years	4,013	1,902	2,113	4.0	3.9	4.0
25 to 34 years	2,649	1,428	1,222	8.0	8.8	7.1
35 to 44 years	845	300	546	3.5	2.6	4.4
45 to 54 years	395	132	263	1.7	1.2	2.2
55 to 64 years	124	42	82	.6	.4	.8
1993						
Total, 25 to 64 years	5,822	2,371	3,451	4.4	3.7	5.1
25 to 34 years	3,244	1,462	1,782	7.9	7.2	8.5
35 to 44 years	1,764	649	1,115	4.3	3.2	5.4
45 to 54 years	702	222	480	2.4	1.6	3.2
55 to 64 years	112	38	74	.5	.4	.7

[1] Proportion of the population enrolled in school.

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Table 2. Percent distribution of employed persons 25 to 64 years old by occupation and school enrollment, October 1993

Occupation	Employed	
	Total	Enrolled
Total (thousands)	99,460	3,901
Percent	100.0	100.0
Managerial and professional specialty	30.0	43.2
Technical, sales, and administrative support	29.6	35.7
Service occupations	11.6	9.9
Precision production, craft, and repair	12.3	5.6
Operators, fabricators, and laborers	14.0	4.8
Farming, forestry, and fishing	2.5	.8

data indicate that most of the increase in the number of older persons enrolled in school between 1978 and 1993 results from a rise in the size of that population, not from rising rates of enrollment.

Technical note

Data on which this report is based are collected each October in a supplement to the CPS, a monthly survey of about 60,000 households, conducted by the Bureau of the Census for the Bureau of Labor Statistics. In the supplement, persons are asked about their school enrollment status. Data used in this report refer to enrollment in a regular school and do not include those who may be enrolled in a vocational school.

For more information on school enrollment after age 25, contact Randy E. Ilg, Office of Employment and Unemployment Statistics, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Washington, DC 20212. (202) 606-6378.

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